Kudzu

Pueraria montana (Lour.) Mer. PUMOL

Native Origin: Japan, China; introduced in early 1900's for erosion control, livestock feed, and folk art

Description: Kudzu is a climbing, semi-woody, perennial vine in the Pea family (Fabaceae) that grows 35 to 100 feet long. Deciduous leaves are alternate and compound, with three broad leaflets up to 4 inches across. Leaflets may be entire or deeply 2-3 lobed with hairy margins. Individual flowers, about 1/2 inch long, are purple, highly fragrant and borne in long hanging clusters. Flowering in late summer is followed by production of brown, hairy, flattened, seed pods, each of which contains three to ten hard seeds. Kudzu grows through vegetative expansion by runners, rhizomes and vines that root at the nodes to create new plants. Kudzu also spreads through seeds contained in pods that mature in the fall.

Habitat: Kudzu grows well under a wide range of conditions and in most soil types. Preferred habitats are forest edges, abandoned fields, roadsides, and disturbed areas, where sunlight is abundant. Kudzu grows best where winters are mild, summer temperatures are above 80 degrees Fahrenheit, and annual rainfall is 40 inches or more.

Distribution: This species is reported from states shaded on Plants Database map. It is extensively reported invasive in AR, CT, DC, DE, FL, GA, IL, IN, KY, MD, MO, MS, NC, ND, NJ, OR, PA, SC, TN, TX, VA, and WV.

Ecological Impacts: Kudzu kills or degrades other plants by smothering them under a solid blanket of leaves, by girdling woody stems and tree trunks, and by breaking branches or uprooting entire trees and shrubs through the sheer force of its weight. Once established, Kudzu plants grow rapidly, extending as much as 60 feet per season at a rate of about one foot per day. This vigorous vine may extend 32-100 feet in length, with stems 1/2 - 4 inches in diameter. Kudzu roots are fleshy, with massive tap roots 7 inches or more in diameter, 6 feet or more in length, and weighing as much as 400 pounds. As many as thirty vines may grow from a single root crown.

Control and Management:

- **Manual**- Cut or mow vines just above ground level, repeated cuttings will help eradicate invasiveness
- **Chemical**- It can be effectively controlled using any of several readily available general use herbicides such as glyphosate, triclopyr, metsulfuron, or picloram. Spray climbing vines as high as possible or cut vines that are not controlled after herbicide treatment. Follow label and state requirements.

- **Natural Enemies**- Twelve species of fungi and forty-eight arthropod species have been reported for Kudzu

References:

www.forestimages.org, http://plants.usda.gov, www.nps.gov/plants/alien,
Miller, James H. Nonnative Invasive Plants of Southern Forest, a Field Guide for Identification and Control, USDA FS SRS-62, p. 40-41, 81
Invasive Plants Established in the United States that are found in Asia and their Associated Natural Enemies, *Biological Control.* Vol. 2, FHTET 2005-15, p. 63-65